

THE WORDS
FROM HIS THRONE

BY BISHOP SLATTERY

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THE MASTER OF THE WORLD: A Study of Christ.
THE LIGHT WITHIN: A Study of the Holy Spirit.
LIFE BEYOND LIFE: A Study of Immortality.
IN TIME OF SORROW: A Book of Consolation.
THE GIFT OF IMMORTALITY.
WHY MEN PRAY.
HOW TO PRAY: A Study of the Lord's Prayer.
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THE WORDS FROM HIS THRONE

A Study of the Cross

BY THE RT. REV.

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PREFACE

AT intervals during my ministry I have kept the Three Hours of Good Friday by giving a series of addresses on The Seven Words of Our Saviour from the Cross. These addresses have changed with the years. They are given here as they were spoken in Trinity Church in Boston on the Good Friday of 1926.

C. L. S.

DIOCESAN HOUSE
BOSTON
28 July 1926

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THE WORDS FROM HIS
THRONE

THE WORDS FROM HIS THRONE

INTRODUCTION

WE have come into this quiet church to spend three hours together in memory of the death of Christ. What I wish you to do first of all is to have a vivid picture of that scene in Jerusalem on the first Good Friday. I wish you to feel yourselves as part of that procession which followed Jesus on His way to Calvary. Note how blood-stained He is. Note His weakness, weakness so acute that He falls down under the weight of the Cross which the soldiers try to make Him carry. Note how Simon of Cyrene is seized upon—an indifferent stranger

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—and is forced to bear the Cross the rest of the way. Stand among the crowds and watch the soldiers prepare the Cross, while the dear Master stands by till they are ready to lay Him upon it. Then the cruel nailing, the lifting the Cross to an upright position, and letting it drop into the hole dug to receive it, with a jar that must have wrenched every sinew and nerve. There He hangs—crucified.

But I do not ask you to look up at that Cross with its sacred burden as the timid friends of Jesus looked up at it. I do not ask you to share their despair, their helplessness, their bitter tears. It is no execution to which I bid you, though it was an execution. It is not even a death-scene to which I bid you, though it was a scene of agonizing dying. After that first Good Friday, came the first Easter Day. And then

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quickly came the final vanishing of Jesus, that He might return in superb might through the Holy Spirit to be with all His followers everywhere, at all times. Since that day of gloom and tears the Name of Jesus has brought to the world increasing joy. Out of the Cross came, as from a mountain spring, sparkling water of refreshing and comfort, which flows by us this very day a majestic river, widening, deepening every moment, till every human soul, having touched its healing waters, shall rise up to sing.

I wish you to see in that first Good Friday all that the beautiful Mother saw and all that the dearest friend John the Son of Zebedee saw. And then I ask you to see much more. I wish you to see some of the results of that dying, as even the closest friend on that day could not see them. I ask you to push

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back the curtains of your imaginations, and surmise, as in a vision, all that the endless years will tell of the sublime and gracious Day.

Doing this, obviously, you will see the physical suffering; and you will sympathize with it. But you will not remain in such a mood. You will not dare to pity the Divine Sufferer. You will not wish that, had you been there, you had been strong enough to drive the soldiers away and to rescue Him. You will not talk of execution. You will not even talk of dying. You will think of life—life crowded with action. You must tingle with a certain proud excitement because One you call your Master is so calm, so heroic. He dies in such a way that the only word you can think of is life. It is not like dying in one's bed. It is like leading an army to victory; the General of the world is in full

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command of His legions, and far ahead of His most eager soldiers He rides with fury against the hosts of Sin; and always, as He keeps looking back upon His friends, His eyes shine for them with love and courage. No wailing can come from us, but a high shout of victory:

Sound, sound the trumpet; shrill the fife,
To all the sensual world proclaim,
One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth a world without a name!

And we may not stop there. We are not watching the supreme victory of an admired hero. He who died in victory on the first Good Friday is to us more than hero. We cannot stand far off as strangers. He is in some way ours.

Let us forget all the figures I have used, and think of one more. Let us say that in all the days in which Jesus had gone in and out among men He

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had been preparing to assume the Kingship of the world. His followers longed to have Him like Caesar; and He told them frankly that there was to be a Kingdom, and He was to be the King of it. This made them think of a King in a palace, seated beneath a canopy, on a gorgeous throne. Jesus let them know that they were right when they looked forward to His coronation and enthronement. But His throne was as no other throne in history. He walked out through the gates of Jerusalem on Good Friday, and on Calvary He took His throne and His kingly power. His throne was the Cross.

So today let us stand about Christ on His Cross as about a beloved, most revered King upon His Throne. "I," He had said, "if I be lifted up will draw all men unto me." At last He had been lifted up. He was firmly established

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upon the throne of the whole earth. All nations, all generations, were destined to come and bow before it. He was now King indeed.

So these Three Hours together I ask you to stand about the Throne of thrones, and to listen to the words which fall from the lips of the King. They are not greater than the words which He spoke before His strange enthronement. But they are, if possible, more significant. They are the words of final authority. They ring out over the ages to tell us who is this Jesus of Nazareth whom we call Lord of Lords, and King of Kings.

Let us listen reverently to each sentence as it falls from His lips. And let us, as simply and clearly as we can, try to think what each sentence means for Him, for us, for the whole world.

THE FIRST WORD

THE FIRST WORD

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”—*St. Luke* xxiii. 34.

IT was probably at about nine o’clock on Good Friday morning that our Saviour was crucified, so that He must have been for six hours on the Cross. Three of the sayings from the Cross which are recorded were spoken before mid-day. The first of the sayings evidently was said just as the agony of the cruel nailing to the Cross was sharpest. It was the moment when the ordinary criminal shrieked and cursed with pain. Our Saviour too uttered a cry, but it was neither imprecation nor complaint. It was, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

This word of our Divine King, spoken under the tragic circumstances,

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permits us to see into His character. Let us meditate upon one or two traits which shine forth in it.

First, notice that at a moment when the world would say that Christ had right to think of Himself, He was thinking of others. These others were His enemies, but of that I do not speak now. I wish to dwell only on the thought that He put Himself aside and fixed His mind on the welfare of others.

Great love, in trying moments, will often escape from itself, and fasten on others its solicitude. I remember how two aged people were desperately ill in the same house. A third person, the life-long companion of these two people, was in constant anxiety lest these, her dearest ones, be taken from her side. Day by day, the illness of each grew more hopeless. The end was inevitable. Yet, she who outlived them

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both, passed from one room to the other with cheer and love. The loneliness was drawing down, thick and black, over her own life, but neither invalid suspected. She who had the hardest burden to bear knew only what she thought of them. She wept when alone before the prospect of what was to come upon her. But as she put her hand upon either door, a vigorous effort of will smoothed out every trace of pain; the smile of an abounding love played about her lips, and she and the brightness of a heavenly light entered the sick room together. Do you think she had right to think of herself? Well, it was a right which she would not claim. She lost thought of herself in thinking of others.

All this is beautiful; but the self-forgetfulness of our Saviour was more than that. This first thought in the anguish of the Cross was not for His

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beloved, but for His enemies, those who were responsible for all His pain. I may pause to say that these enemies were not the Roman soldiers who were the mechanical tools of their masters. The people to whom He referred were the Jewish authorities who had turned every stone to compass His death: they were His real enemies. So you see that, in refusing to think of Himself in this moment when the world would say that He had full right to think only of Himself, His thoughts went out to the ends of His acquaintance, and touched at last those who, in sympathy and care, stood farthest removed.

Now let us go a step farther. He thought of His enemies, but He did not reflect upon their villainy, their harshness, their malice. His thought touched them and then glanced upward in prayer to the Father. "Father," He

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prayed, "forgive them; for they know not what they do."

It is no accident that forgiveness stands first among the words of our Saviour on the Day of His sacrifice. He had impressed upon His disciples, months before, the essential need of forgiveness: "Unless," He had said, "ye from your hearts forgive everyone his brother his trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses." That is sweeping, exact. How God retains sin upon the unforgiving man, I can tell you no better than by repeating an old story from authentic history. Two friends who lived in the middle of the third century became estranged one from the other. One was a priest; the other a layman. The layman felt the bitterness of the enmity, and desired reconciliation. Message after message he sent to the priest beg-

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ging his forgiveness; but the priest coldly ignored the entreaties. A little later a persecution arose. The priest was suspected, arrested; because he bravely confessed his office and faith, he was ordered to sacrifice to the gods, or die. Even when tortured, he refused to yield; and, like a hero, he was led out to be executed. As he passed by, his old friend ran up and begged forgiveness. The priest would not even look upon him: his heart was still as flint against him. "O Martyr of Christ," the anxious friend wailed, "forgive me!" But the priest answered not a syllable. By this time he had reached the block. The executioner bade him kneel down and put his head upon it. Suddenly the once brave man turned pale, shook like a reed, and whimpered that he would offer the heathen sacrifice after all. The old friend sprang forward: "No, no,"

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he cried, "do not say so; do not deny Christ; do not lose what you have all but won!" But the unforgiving man, turned coward, would not hear; he went away denying His Saviour. Instantly the poor layman took His place. He was the Christian Martyr on that day.

The lesson of this story is clear. To persist in hating, is to harden the heart; and when the heart is hard, not even the love of God can pierce the barrier. God will not forgive the unforgiving. He can live only in the forgiving soul.

People who accept this truth, excuse themselves by saying that the wrongs done them are extraordinary. "You," they say, "can forgive; because your wrongs are only superficial. They do not affect your honour." Such people know their own injuries so exclusively that they lack imagination to grasp the wrongs done to others. The world is

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full of people who need forgiveness for excruciating injury which they have inflicted. When we glance at our Saviour's forgiveness, we see that He was forgiving the most stinging crimes of which the world has knowledge. Those who had brought Him to His wretchedness, meant to finish not only His personal existence, but also His kingdom, His teaching, all that He had worked for. Moreover, the pain that they had caused was not His alone: the hardest part of it must have been that He could not forget the distress of His mother and of His dearest friends. All the injuries that could be heaped upon human flesh, were heaped upon Him.

So when God whispers to you that you must forgive, forget the bitter scores which your forgiveness must rub out, and think only of the woes which the Lord Himself forgave. Genuine

THE FIRST WORD

forgiveness has been achieved. It must be achieved again. And again. And again. And again—till all are forgiven.

If there is any heart here today which feels itself growing hard, then to him whose heart that is I hold up the perfect forgiveness of Jesus. To reach old age unchildlike, resentful, bitter, is to reach the end of the way, and not to find heaven there. Keep your hearts tender. Forgive; that the God of forgiveness may live in you.

But this is not the end. “Forgive them,” said Jesus; “for they know not what they do.” We can never forget that He who spoke these words, had said not twelve hours before, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” The forgiveness in this first sentence from the Cross is the forgiveness of redeemed humanity. The forgiveness of the Cross is the revelation of the for-

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giveness of the Father in Heaven. The answer of that prayer is certain. All Heaven is still sounding with the response: "I forgive them; for they know not what they do." It is on Good Friday that we begin afresh to know who God is. He is no exacting taskmaster. He is not waiting to catch and trip us in our blundering ways. He is our Father. He does care. He is not casting up our sins against us. He knows how we grope and stumble and fall. He pities us. He loves us even when we fail. He forgives us because we know not what we do.

It is a shallow philosophy which pleads that men will become careless if they believe in God's patience. If a man really sees, even for the flash of one transcendent moment, how God bears with us, how He excuses us, how He lifts us from our falls, how He never is

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weary of waiting for us to mend our ways, then a man will cry, out of a heart overflowing with gratitude, "O my Saviour, O my King, if Thy love is so forgiving, so strong, I will arise and go to my Father. I will, with His help, so live that I may please Him at the last. All good deeds shall become possible for me. Even in my darkest hour I too shall cry, 'Father, forgive them; for, from my heart, I forgive them too.' "

THE SECOND WORD

THE SECOND WORD

“Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”—*St. Luke xxiii. 43.*

IT is commonly said that one of the saddest incidents of our Saviour’s Crucifixion is the fact that He was crucified between two thieves. This association with actual transgressors must, it is said, have made His blameless soul shrink with aversion: to be confused with vulgar highwaymen must have been the summit of indignity. This is a natural reflection for most of us who are selfish, perhaps a little snobbish, narrowly eager to maintain our own reputations. We forget, however, that Jesus Christ was unselfish to the last degree, that in His course through the world He had been afraid of touching

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not even lepers; that everything human, because it was human, was dear to Him. When, therefore, the three crosses were in place, when the screams and revilings of the two victims had subsided to moans, when He was permitted to think of the situation, I am sure that He turned sympathetic eyes upon the poor, erring men who were outwardly in the same plight with Himself. First, there was the sense of fellowship. He was not alone. We must believe that our Lord craved human fellowship; we must believe that it was therefore sharp sorrow to remember that all His friends had deserted Him when most He needed their sympathy, their human touch; we must believe that it was solace to find that the criminals of that day were not to suffer in some other spot, but that He and they were to be side by side bound together by the

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bonds of a similar misfortune. He had spent His whole life trying to help people who needed help. He had never shunned poverty and sorrow, if poverty and sorrow could bring Him close to troubled men. Here were these two thieves: they needed help as few men on earth can need it. Had He been comfortably beneath, among the staring, gossiping crowd, He might have helped by encouragement, by warning, by heavenly comfort. But they would not have felt that He knew what it meant to be crucified. As it was, He was suffering exactly as they were suffering. His heart ached for them—and they might perhaps understand His sympathy; for was He not literally sharing their pain? I am sure, then, that it was to Jesus Christ no added shame that He and the thieves perished together. Since He and they must suf-

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fer, I am convinced that He was glad to be as close as possible to their despair.

Now let us pause to get a clear view of the scene. It was a pitiless age. When gentlewomen could delight in gladiatorial butchery, we can imagine with what cold-blooded interest a mob would watch the dying of three crucified men. We may believe that not a head was turned away, that not a shudder escaped the lips, that while the bodies were writhing, and the shrieks were loudest, the crowd was eagerly still to enjoy every item of the excruciating pain which was to end only in death. When the victims grew quiet, with sheer weariness, when the sensations of the mob were sated, then the tongues of the mob were unloosed. They began to fling out their coarse jibes, and laugh hoarsely at their own wit. Naturally, the height of humour,

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as they understood it, was the fact that only a few days before this Jesus had been talking about being a King. Even they, shrewd as they were, had been nearly taken in by the power of His kindness as He had healed their sick, and snatched the dying from death. Now here He was dying between two common robbers. They laughed, they railed. "Ha!" they scoffed, "thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days, save thyself, and come down from the cross." Even the Jewish gentlemen who were there smiled grimly among themselves, and said, "He saved others, himself he cannot save." Then most gruesome of all, one of the robbers, roused from his pain by the jeering, cast the same jest in his teeth: "Art not thou the Christ?" he sneered, "save thyself and us." Then instantly the other robber found his manhood and

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spoke out of his misery a brave and high rebuke. "Dost thou not even fear God," he said, "seeing thou art in the same condemnation? We indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss." The boldness, the sincerity, the manliness of the words evidently put the mob to silence. The conviction of the robber for an instant convinced the crowd. And there was a hush over the scene. Then some inspiring event happened in the stillness. Did Jesus turn to look with grateful honour upon the brave man? Did the love shine out of His weary eyes with such brilliancy that the robber's soul caught fire, and burned with irresistible love in response? No one can tell; but I think so. For the man answered with tones which still thrill us, "O Jesus, remember me when thou comest in thy king-

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dom.” And Jesus whispered to him, “Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in Paradise.”

This penitence of the dying robber is sometimes cited as evidence of the value of death-bed repentance. Repentance, whenever it may come, is a vital thing. One word of warning must be given to those who think that they may put off setting themselves right with God. To be scared by approaching death into saying that one is sorry for all one’s past is not repentance. It is only cowardice fleeing from the dreaded consequences of one’s sin. When the soul wakes up in another world, it will probably laugh to itself and say: “Well, I was badly scared. I take my repentance all back. I do not care at all.” I draw attention to this possibility to make clear the contrast which the true penitence of the dying robber presents.

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He was no coward fleeing results. He acknowledged that he deserved his hard fate. He was not making bargains. He was above all that. His whole heart went out to Jesus. He loved Him. He longed to be with Him.

Another thought I wish to emphasize. Down among the crowd was perhaps some Gamaliel, a man of blameless past. True, he was indifferent, hard-hearted, unresponsive; but he had no actual crimes to his account. On one of the crosses was a law-breaker, a man whose past was soiled; and Jesus was admitting him to His kingdom, with not a word for the other—the one whom the world would call the better man. What does it mean? Well, among other things, it means this: What you have accomplished, the virtues done, and neatly folded away in napkins, will not help you. What alone helps you at any mo-

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ment of time or eternity, is what you are.

For what you have been may have left you self-complacent, careless, impervious to good influences. You may be trying to live with the aid of the account in a bank which years ago went into the hands of receivers. But if today you are doing exactly right, if your heart is full of love, if it is fixed with the determination to do exactly right, if you have prayed to God that He fuse your little will with His inexhaustible power, then you are secure. Your past will not count against you. To you, too, Jesus will say, though He pass by many who seem more righteous than you, "Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

It is again the King who speaks. The love is evident enough. And with the note of authority in the voice of the

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dying Jesus the power is also evident. For one resplendent instant the penitent thief must have forgotten that He was in the hurly-burly of a Roman execution. The crown of thorns must have melted into a crown of celestial light. The outstretched arms, so sternly fastened, must have seemed arms spread wide in blessing and in power. He saw the King. He knew himself to be loved —so loved that Jesus was to share even death with him—so loved that where Jesus went he was to go. As Jesus went with him to the depths of human woe, so he was to go with Jesus to the peaks of divine joy. Now at last he knew love. He knew the love of man. He knew the love of God.

So we reach the climax of this second word of Jesus our King which He spoke from His throne. The love of God is awaiting eagerly one word of consent

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from us, that we may share His joy. He breaks through no barriers which we raise against Him. He respects our independence. Though He longs for us, as a mother longs for her absent child, He leaves us free to choose Him for ourselves. But when we turn to Him even a little, He comes running to meet us, as the story of the Prodigal Son truly tells. He folds us in the arms of His almighty Love. We know Him at last. We are destined to be with Him —in Earth, in Paradise, in Heaven—for ever!

THE THIRD WORD

THE THIRD WORD

“Behold thy Son . . . Behold thy mother.”—
St. John xix. 26, 27.

AS the morning wore on, the crowd before the Cross melted away. Some doubtless were minded to go about their work. Others, tired of the spectacle, especially when the sufferers grew quiet, sauntered back to the city in search of new sensations. Perhaps our Saviour had closed His eyes in prayer. In any case, as He looked down from the Cross, about mid-day, He caught sight of two figures standing near—His mother, and John, His most cherished friend. That His mother was still able to stand, that she had not swooned, shows to us how marvellously she held herself in control. Our Saviour spoke to her; but notice the dignified calm of

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His words, the restraint. Any word of deep affection, any intimation of the degree of His own pain, would quite unnerve her, and send her into paroxysms of weeping. He told her by a most practical word His love; He declared His will for her future. "Woman," He said, with stern tenderness, "behold thy Son!" Then turning His eyes full on the beloved disciple, He added, "Behold thy mother."

*He is not
only a God of
Death in
shadow
shepherd I
see not man*

There is a lesson here about helping people who are in grief. We catch a glimpse of our Saviour's method of comforting the bereaved. He who could have given explanations as none other, attempted no explanation. We say then that in the blackness of sorrow it is not the mind to which the appeal should be made, but the heart. If Christ attempted no explanation, who shall dare attempt it! He gave some-

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thing better than explanation: He gave love. Nor was it that love which is satisfied with protestations of affection. It did not pause for words. It sped instantly to the heart of love: it made provision for the life of her who was dearest to Him. As she would look day by day into the face of John, she would think with gratitude that the peace and joy of this new life was the parting gift of her Son Jesus. Every day she would know how deep, how real was His love for her. The comfort was perennial.

When it falls to our lot to go through a door where grief has entered before us, we should offer no glib platitude, for that will mock and hurt. Even words of affection may be few, for unless they come from the depth of the soul they will tinkle with hollowness and unreality. Rather should we do some deed of love, a deed so practical,

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so simple, so genuine, that the poor, troubled spirit will recognize forthwith that brotherly love is an unalterable fact; that, by inference, there is a God of Love above the waterfloods, who will care for all who have vanished and for all who remain. The consolation of Jesus teaches us to be active messengers of the love of God.

“Behold thy Son . . . Behold thy mother.” These words spoken by Christ to the two persons whom on earth He held dearest, conjure up a vision of consummate friendship. John had deserted Him with the rest; but afterward he had followed to the High Priest’s court, then to the palace of Pilate, and here at last he was before the Cross. What he had failed to do for his Master was not now counted against him. Jesus remembered only his loyalty. So, without hesitation He

THE THIRD WORD

commended to His friend the privilege closest to His heart.

What had John done to deserve this highest honour? He had stood by his Master in adversity. It was an unpopular thing to do. It might be dangerous. The test of friendship had come to John, for a moment he had been found wanting; but quickly he recovered himself, and at the trials, at the Cross, he was in perilous evidence. The Master to whom he owed all, should know that he loved Him still. If any other disciples lurked in the throngs of idle spectators, we do not know their names. If they were not there—and we infer that they were not—then the proportion of friends faithful in adversity was perhaps greater among the chosen Twelve than among the friends of the world at large. When misfortune and suspicion fall upon the life of

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one called a friend, quickly the genuine friends are sifted from the easy-going acquaintances. Those who are friends by accident, by propinquity, pretend that they never saw the unpopular person. Those who knew his bounty, his friendly aid run to new patrons, now that he can do no more for them. Only he whose love is true as steel and deep as the ocean will stay frankly devoted. All the rest will find excellent reasons why they must be off to other pastures. The Lord Jesus had the comfort of at least one loyal friend—one who let his love be known, on the one day when to be a known friend of Jesus of Nazareth was to be laughed at and despised.

As soon as Jesus saw this truest of friends, He let him know that he appreciated him, and cared for him. There is no hint that He remembered the dark hour of the arrest at Gethsemane, when

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even John ran away like a coward. There is no accent of reproach. The words are all trust, confidence, reliance. He had loved John; John loved Him with all the strength of his human love; and now Jesus poured back love unspeakable into the faithful heart of His friend.

Once more let us remember that it is not a poor tired Criminal who committed His mother to His friend; it is the King of all the earth. In His appreciation we read the attitude of God our Father towards all who strive to serve Him truly. People sometimes philosophize about the vanity of men's trying to serve in any way an omnipotent God. What can He want? Nothing, is the reply; for He is almighty. What can He desire? Nothing! for in a flash His omnipotence can create it. Excellent philosophy this may be. But there

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is one thing only which God asks of us. Omnipotent as He is, He will not force us to give it; He desires it as our free gift; He desires our Love. How we express it to Him is immaterial. That we express it in a way that is absolutely sincere is alone essential. Mere words, rattled off like the soulless sounds of a phonograph, will not tell any story at all. The regular presence at church, deliberately planned as an act of love to God may tell Him the news He longs to get. Giving what we can ill part with to make a great cause move to victory may also tell Him that we are trying to give something to Him. Helping a fellow-mortal, either in a material way or in a spiritual way, may be the medium through which He will get the joyful assurance that we really care. By the revelation of the appreciation of friendship which Jesus demonstrated

THE THIRD WORD

on Good Friday when He recognized the love of St. John, we know that God is always watching us. The hairs of our heads are all numbered. He is grieved when we go through the day, and do nothing consciously for His sake. A cup of cold water given in His Name will please Him. If we can do no more, He will be as pleased with our offering as if we had added a new solar system to the universe. If we offer a cup of cold water to one who needs more and for whom we can do more, He will be grieved. It is not the conventional word, the conventional gift, that He craves. He longs for some true symbol of our love.

One note of that love made manifest to Christ, will bring from Him its due reward. His appreciation is swifter than the lightning. And what shall that reward be? The King of men de-

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clared it from His throne to His most loved subject, John. "Behold thy mother," He said. A larger opportunity to show his love was the reward given to John. You cannot say that it was more work, though the element of toil was to enter in. The toil was so joyous that it ceased to be work. What father thinks of the toil which purchased the gift, when he brings to his child that which makes his child throw his arms about his father's neck and thank him with rapture? The father did toil and save and deny himself to make the gift. But, being a loving father, he measures the value of his gift not in terms of work, but in terms of love. So, when honestly and sincerely you have loved God a very little, God will tell you how much He cares for your love, and then He will grant you the privilege of loving Him more. He

THE THIRD WORD

will give you something harder and finer to do. And day by day—let us dare to say it—God and you will grow to be closer friends. You will rely more and more on Him—and, marvel of marvels, He will rely more and more on you. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Some day perhaps you will love Him enough for that. You will have cared for His sheep, you will have tended His lambs. You will have gone through peril and pain, seeking the forlorn and the lost. Perhaps in seeking those who have strayed farthest you will meet death. Who knows? It is the way God will have told you that He loves you with an endless love. You too will be His beloved disciple for ever.

THE FOURTH WORD

THE FOURTH WORD

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”—*St. Mark xv. 34.*

AFTER our Saviour had commended His mother to His friend, the beloved disciple led her away. Jesus wished to have her removed from the harrowing sights and sounds; yet a new loneliness beat in upon His soul when she had gone. The very fact that He had seen her fortitude, made His desolation the more poignant when the incident was over. Then, about mid-day, the black clouds swept up the sky, and the earth grew cheerless and dim. The air was ominous with gloom, as when men await the shock of a mighty storm. This darkness is generally interpreted as the sympathy of nature with the Son

THE WORDS FROM HIS THRONE

of God. That is poetic and beautiful; but there is a profounder meaning in the black clouds of Good Friday. We must think how this gloom in nature must have affected the sensitiveness of Christ. When we are heavy-hearted we know that it helps us to have the sun shine: Jesus Christ must have responded to the sunshine even as we. So when to all the woes of Good Friday the sun hid his face and the earth grew dark, the spirit of Jesus must have sunk lower still. The blackness of an awful night was closing in upon His soul. He felt the sting of a terrible loneliness. Did even God care? "My God, my God," He cried, "why hast thou forsaken me?"

In the effort to extract from these words a theological meaning, their natural force has often been lost. They have a theological meaning, and I shall

THE FOURTH WORD

come to that later; but think now of the meaning which lies close to the surface.

I remember that one day when I went to see a man of strong faith who suddenly met overwhelming sorrow, he looked me straight in the eye, and said with a sob, "I doubt everything." I knew that his faith would come back. But I knew also that, for that black moment, his soul was in the nethermost hell. It was the moment when God did not seem to care—or, he wondered, was there a God at all? Perhaps almost every one who has gone through deep waters meets that stifling doubt. It may last but the twinkling of an eye, but all eternity seems to pass in that flash. That is the loneliness unspeakable. The King of men met that supreme doubt.

And this is not all. Jesus Christ was

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THE FOURTH WORD

Son into the world to do a work which was altogether new. No one had ever passed that way before. The sights and sounds were gruesome, because all was unfamiliar. It was a loneliness transcending the loneliness of grief, transcending the loneliness of all human effort. It was the loneliness of the King of Kings suffering for His people.

So we come to ask the theological meaning of the agonizing cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" That is a shabby theology which tries to reduce the problem to a sum in arithmetic; and to say that because man had infinitely sinned, so God's justice required an infinite punishment, therefore because men could not pay the bill, the Son of God paid it for them, and God was appeased. Jesus Christ did higher and better things for us than

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Let us think again of the Cross as the Throne of the world, and of the Crucified Saviour as the King of Kings. It is characteristic of any king who has the kingly instinct that he speaks of the people whom he governs as his people. If any woe befalls them, it befalls him. The real king is, like David, a shepherd. He shares the life of his flock. It is not his living which they provide, but his life. Some rulers are thieves and robbers; the real ruler is so lost in the life of his people that all he has is theirs. David, Alfred, William of Orange, Lincoln, suggest what a ruler can be. Even so we get but broken lights of the ideal which became real in the life of Jesus Christ, the King of all.

As Jesus Christ looked about the world, as He went upon His task, He

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He counted up no risks, real as the risks were. He had no selfish shrinking from what was foul and loathsome, though none as He hated uncleanness. It was the love passing all human dreams which made Him long to fuse His life with the life of humanity, so that ever since, humanity has been Christ, and Christ is humanity.

With this in mind, think again of the loneliest cry which ever passed human lips, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Who was the "me"? Not one poor sufferer, call Him what you will, either man or God. No; the "me" of this sobbing appeal was humanity in Christ. Even dying, Jesus allowed Himself no luxury of virtue uncontaminated. All the despair gathered about the Cross was the result of human failure and sin. The crimes, the injustices, the basenesses of Judea, of Rome,

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of the whole earth, saw their climax in the Cross. Christ, in spite of the world's badness, had loved it. He came to the world for the express purpose of loving it, even to the death—for His own sake and for His Father's sake. He had lost Himself in the world. He knew no boundary line where the vile world stopped and His spotless life began. They were one. He had given all. He had poured all His divine nature into the seething cauldron of humanity. He, the mightiest, had given omnipotence. Now, hear the cry again: “My God, my God, hast thou forsaken me? *Have I failed?*”—that was His woe. Everything had been done which could be done. If Love like His would not help, then the world was lost for ever. No other appeal could be made. The topmost pitch of God's Love had been sounded. The cry came not only

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Thus gaze upon the King on His throne! Never was such love on land or sea. He was lonely as we are lonely; only the loneliness swept by that little goal, and was lost in the unmeasured reaches of space. He was lonely for us. He might have failed; for Himself He cared not. His agony was that his failure meant our failure. Behold, what Love has been poured out for us. Never mother wept for her child, as

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THE FIFTH WORD

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Our Saviour always conformed to the simple life of the common man. Is any poor; so was He. Is any sorrowful; so was He. Is any in the misery of doubt; so was He. Is any in pain; so was He. Is any dying, reaching out for a sip of cooling water; so was He: He too said, intensely, patiently, wearily, “I am thirsty.”

It is at once pathetic and inspiring that our King touched our lives at every point. He did not live above us, He lived with us. He touched all the common joys and sorrows, and with His touch they have become divine. When men asked Him about heaven, He put

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Several days after a battle in the Civil War, an officer of the Hospital Commission, going over the bloody field, heard a weak voice calling him. One whom he had thought dead was still alive. Horribly wounded, the soldier could not hope to live; but it was a

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THE SIXTH WORD

told them to do. It was the merest fragment, without beginning or ending, which they could contribute by their arduous lives. They looked forward to the fulfilment of what was to come, but all died without seeing the promise. All had contributed towards it: none saw the completed work. In this light think again of our Saviour's cry, "It is finished." What was finished? The work of all previous humanity was finished. Christ, the head and King of humanity, gathered up into His dying all the conquests of the heroes and saints of old. All their fragmentary victories found in His Cross their complete Victory. They had not lived in vain. Everything that they had done had counted. Each, in his office, had done an essential share in making the Victory of the Cross possible.

We must never forget that in the

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Cross not only was God giving love to man, but, equally and exactly, man was giving a perfect love to God. The offering of joy through pain in obedience to duty was man's supreme gift. Jesus the King was altogether human, just as He was altogether divine. So, as Man, by the Cross He drew together all the joyful obedience of mankind to God. Into His supreme task, He fused all the little triumphs of the obscure good people, whether they had lived in heathen Greece, in heathen Persia, or among the elect of Mount Sion. Not one element in the gradually ascending scale was lost. Every man's conquest was to count, because Christ, the King of all, completed it. How far, then, is that cry of the Cross from pathos! It is the exultant cry of a completed humanity speaking through the lips of Christ. "It is finished, it is finished!"

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Every feeble duty well performed; every daring hope honestly pursued; every life laid down for God and country; everything has counted—"It is finished!" One man, at length, has been able to do the last hard deed. The work is crowned and made perfect. Man has done the impossible. "It is finished!"

In that moment the world was redeemed. Henceforth Redemption was in every man's possession: all a man needed to do was to appropriate it. But here we find a very sober difficulty. Some men do not understand Christ's love, some men never have heard of it. Since that triumphant moment on the Cross it has been the task of those who understand Christ to persuade all men what it is to love and serve Him. Once again, men are living fragmentary lives. Each, so far as he sees, so far as he has caught the fire of Christ's love, so far

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as he is able, is trying to bring the world to the feet of Christ. Christ is waiting. God is waiting. But mankind is not forced to love God. Mankind must of its own will decide to give a love to God which shall in some sense match God's love for man. A man here, a man there, is giving his life to persuade all men to rise to their privilege, to give love for love. Each prophet, poet, missionary, gives all, and sees no perceptible advance towards his dream. But there is advance. The dream is, fragment by fragment, coming true. The great task was done once for all on Calvary. We who live today on the earth need only to enter into the fruits of it. The day is surely coming when every man shall have heard, when every man's heart shall have been touched, when every man's mind shall have been convinced, when every man's will shall have caught

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fire from on high. Then shall be the new ending. All earth and heaven shall be caught up in the glory of it. Then again from the imperishable throne of His Cross, Christ the King shall cry, over land and sea, "It is finished,—the Kingdom is complete!" And all the redeemed shall echo back, "It is finished,—the whole world has come to Christ." And the angelic choirs of all heaven shall cry, "It is finished!"

THE SEVENTH WORD

THE SEVENTH WORD

“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”—*St. Luke* xxiii. 46.

IMMEDIATELY after the Saviour had said, “It is finished,” He breathed His last breath, but with that last breath He said, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”

Through all the centuries holy men, dying, have repeated these words. The first martyr, Stephen, as the stones were hurled at him, prayed, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge; Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” We see how the memory of Christ’s dying helped His followers, from the first, to quit them like men. Only a few years ago the whole world was moved by the Christian prayer of a martyred President, “Not my will, but thine be done.”

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With the memory of Jesus, death loses all its fears. To go to a Father who loves us as Jesus has shown that He loves us,—what could be better than that! Will He not certainly do what is best and happiest for us and ours? The shadows may draw down thick and black, but behind them all is the brightness of the Father's Face. He will do for us better things than we can desire or pray for. When, therefore, we see no way before us, when we come to the unknown, there is but one thing to do, an act of faith bright and beautiful, full of rest and peace: "Into thy hands, O Father, we commend our spirits."

But the thought of this last word of Christ was not new to Him. Its strengthening power came from the fact that all His life long He had been saying it. It is the indication of complete trust in God which makes the

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perfection of our Saviour's life. He had taken God at His word. He did the impossible, because God told Him to do it. He found comfort in dreariness and agony, because God's will was within them.

I ask you to think of such trust in God today. Good Friday is not to teach us how to die but how to live. For Jesus died as He died, because He had lived as He had lived. If you live through the common days, trusting in God, you will smile in the face of death: your trust will be firm and steady to the very end.

“Into thy hands, O Father, I commend my spirit.” Let us meditate what that means for one who has life ahead. Well, in the first place, God has rules and laws, He wishes us to love Him. Loving Him we shall do what He wishes us to do: we shall keep His

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rules. Yet on all hands there are people careless of what He may wish them to do. Let us not be thoughtless of His desire. He bids us do extremely difficult things, such as forgiving our enemies from our hearts. Then there are simple things which He bids us do. He bids us assemble ourselves together on the Day of Rest, to worship Him; He bids us to break bread and eat, to pour out wine and taste of it, in memory of His Love through Jesus Christ, with the assurance that so we shall receive into our lives the inmost Life of Christ, and our lives shall melt into His. His commandments are not grievous. But they are definite. To commit ourselves to His keeping means that we lose our little wills in His infinite will. We do not dare decide when we have gone far enough. As the eyes of children look up to the face of the mother, so we, as

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trusting servants and children of God, look up to Him for direction.

What I beg of you today is to cultivate tenderness of heart. Do not think of giving God ninety-nine one-hundredths of your lives. Do not say, "I must keep back an ancient bitterness in my heart,—God can have all but the resignation of that!" Give God *all*—every atom of your nature. Lay your self-conceit, your boasted clearness, your logical sense, your withholdings, your pride, your enmities, your encrusted dignity,—lay them all at His feet. Do not be like a spoiled child and try to argue with God. Give your independence to Him, that with His strength your independence may be His gift to you. Do not be always weeping, large-eyed with anxiety, because your stubborn persistence in thinking that you know how to live

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leads you into days of melancholy, into days when you are unbearable to yourself, and, you fear, to all who must live with you. Surrender! Surrender unconditionally. Surrender every whim and prejudice, every habit and self-made rule—surrender all to God.

I can imagine that, if these words seem at all real to you, you will say that you are too old to begin anew. The old bitterness has sunk into your life, and you cannot dislodge it. It is not a question of can. It is a question of will. Do you really wish to give up everything to God, to obey Him in every single motion? I do not mean, Have you a sentiment in that direction, have you a little flutter of emotion? I mean, Do you long to do exactly what He tells you? Does it make you weep because all these years you have been so stubborn, self-opinionated, and cold? When

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you pray for such surrender to His will, do you pray as you have perhaps prayed when one you loved was ill, or when some stunning blow seemed imminent in your life? Do you have an honest longing to be rid of your stupidly conceited self-management, and to be taken prisoner by God's Almighty Spirit? I am not saying these words to fill in the moments. I am trying to probe your hearts, that you may ask yourselves the honest question, and get from yourselves an honest answer. Can you say with St. Augustine, "O Lord, my heart can find no peace, till it rests in Thee"—or does that sound like the exalted word of a dreaming mystic?

I wish to inspire no answer which is not real. If you do not think you care to give God everything you have, everything you are—then confess it. Let

THE WORDS FROM HIS THRONE

us face the situation fairly. Do not escape by that cowardly device which says, "I do not submit altogether to God, but then I submit as much as anyone submits." That is both cowardly and false. There have been men who, at any rate, have tried to surrender all to God. There are such people today. If they really have tried and are still trying, some day they will succeed. God is pleased by our genuine efforts—not, mark, our wishes or our sentiments. The man who really tries to please God will please Him.

But let me suppose that you frankly admit that there are bitternesses in your life so deep seated, so much part of you, that you cannot say, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." What then? Then remember that this is Good Friday. Forget your difficulties, forget yourself. Look up at the Cross

THE SEVENTH WORD

of Christ. See the King of Surrender, the King of Love. Why did He do it all? Because God told Him to do it. Why did God tell Him? Because "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son," that everyone who surrenders as He surrendered may have joy and peace and eternal life. That is the way God loves you. Do you understand even a little of it? He surrendered all for you—every attribute and prerogative of His Almighty Perfection. He surrendered that He might love you with an infinite love. He was not displaying Love, He was not setting an example of Love, *He was loving you*—when Jesus died on the Cross. He gave all He had for you. I am not using strong words. I believe every syllable that I utter. If I could get stronger words I should use them. In the Cross of Jesus we see God giving

THE WORDS FROM HIS THRONE

up all for our sakes. He loves us to the utmost limit of His infinite power.

When Jesus came to Golgotha they hanged Him on a tree,

They drove great nails through hands and feet and made a Calvary.

They crowned Him with a crown of thorns, red were His wounds and deep,

For those were crude and cruel days, and human flesh was cheap.

When Jesus came to Birmingham they simply passed Him by,

They never hurt a hair of Him, they only let Him die.

For men had grown more tender and they would not give Him pain,

They only just passed down the street, and left Him in the rain.

Still Jesus cried, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do,"

And still it rained the winter rain that drenched Him through and through,

The crowds went home and left the streets without a soul to see,

And Jesus crouched against a wall and cried for Calvary.

THE SEVENTH WORD

Now do you not believe that? I think you must believe it. Then is not your gratitude stirred? Will you not give love for love? Will you not surrender your little all to God, as God surrendered His omnipotent All to you? Do you not feel your love transcend all your conceit, your poor little treasure of wisdom, your pride? Does it really seem to you hard to forgive a poor blundering fellow mortal when you know how Jesus forgave such as you? Do you really feel that you can set the bounds of legitimate obedience and surrender, when you see your King crucified for the love which God bore to you? Do you not see the folly of resistance, of isolation!

Then let us away to the Cross of Christ! O Lord, Thou mayest have all we have and all we are. Not one shred of the old life is left us. We give all to

THE WORDS FROM HIS THRONE

Thee. Thou hast loved us; our love is Thine. We give Thee love for love. To Thee, O King of Kings, we surrender. We live to do Thy will. Call us whither Thou wilt, thither will we go. No duty can be too trifling, no sacrifice too great. We are dead to ourselves. Our life is hid with Christ in God. "Father, into thy hands we commend our spirits."

O GOD, whose blessed Son endured the bitterness of the cross; Grant that all thy servants in trouble may remember him, receiving strength from his strength, till they all partake of his victory; through the same Jesus Christ our Saviour. *Amen.*

ALMIGHTY God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified; Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

O GOD, who hast prepared for those who love thee such good things as pass man's understanding; Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*